

RECOGNIZING THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE DURING WORLD WAR II

SPEECH OF

**HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, November 16, 2004*

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge during World War II, and I rise today in recognition of this courageous and crucial battle, fought by our brave soldiers more than half a century ago.

On December 16, 1944, during the coldest, snowiest weather "in memory" in the Ardennes Forest on the German/Belgium border, the German War Machine started their infamous "Ardennes Offensive." Even though the German Offensive achieved total surprise, nowhere did the American troops give ground without a determined fight. Within 3 days, the unwavering American stand and the arrival of dominant reinforcements insured that the German goal was far beyond reach. In all, 19,000 American soldiers perished during this momentous battle.

The soldiers often fought in zero-temperature conditions and driving snow, which prevented them from seeing more than 10 yards in front of them. With equipment and uniforms that were designed for warmer times, frostbite became a terrible reality and a frequent occurrence. Because soldiers were often cut off from their divisions in foxholes, the wounded, in some cases, literally froze to death. To this day, our soldiers' sacrifice remains immeasurable.

The Battle of the Bulge ended in the last few days of January 1945, when American troops made their way back to the original lines. But for many of our brave veterans this terrible battle has never ended.

I stand here today in recognition of the sacrifice and commitment of our brave veterans. After 60 years, our gratitude could never be put into words, although our determination to provide them with full recognition of their service remains everlasting.

Mr. Speaker, on the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, I am honored to recognize the service and gallantry of our veterans who fought in this epic battle.

DEMOCRATIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, November 19, 2004*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, as the 108th Congress comes to an end, I want to make some observations about democratization in Central Asia, an energy-rich and geo-strategically important region. All these states are ruled by secular leaders who cooperate with Washington against terrorists. There are U.S. bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, to help promote stabilization in Afghanistan. This collaboration benefits us, as well as Central Asian presidents, and should certainly continue. But unfortunately, these countries are some of the worst human rights

violators in the OSCE space. Everywhere in the region, super-presidents dominate the political arena, with parliaments and judicial systems dependent on the executive branch. Media are under heavy government pressure; in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Soviet-era censorship continues in force. Equally characteristic of Central Asian states is corruption, which has not only enriched the ruling families and the favored few at the top but has impeded the development of free media and independent courts.

True, much of this characterization could be said about all the post-Soviet states to some degree, including Russia. But it is important to point out that there is a counter, or competing tendency in the region, exemplified by Georgia's Rose Revolution of a year ago. While Georgia has a long way to go, there is no doubt about the legitimacy or popularity of its leader, President Mikheil Saakashvili. Also the peaceful protest movement he led to overturn the results of a rigged election has emboldened opposition activists throughout the former Soviet Union to believe that society may yet be able to have a voice in who governs and how.

Central Asian leaders were quick to claim that circumstances in Georgia were so different from their own that no parallels were possible. Still, the Georgian example sent shivers down their spines. That is one reason why the elections in Central Asia that have taken place this year have been, as they were in the past, carefully controlled, with predictable outcomes.

Uzbekistan, for example, is holding parliamentary election in December. No opposition parties have been allowed to operate in Uzbekistan since 1992–1993. Despite pressure from Washington, Tashkent refused to register opposition parties this year, leaving only five pro-government parties to participate. Moreover, Uzbek authorities have contrived to keep opposition candidates from registering in single mandate races—even though officials told the U.S. Delegation to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Review Meeting in Warsaw in October that opposition candidates would be able to run. The result is obvious in advance: another pro-government, pocket parliament, with no dissenting voices and no capacity to perform any oversight of the executive branch. It should be noted that there have been several outbursts of popular dissatisfaction in Uzbekistan in the last few months; President Islam Karimov's tightly-run political system may be less stable than many suppose.

In neighboring, oil-rich Kazakhstan, opposition parties are registered and were able to compete in September's parliamentary election. Kazakhstan had previously expressed its desire to become OSCE Chairman-in-Office in 2009, and many observers linked Kazakhstan's chances to a good grade on the parliamentary election. But the assessment of OSCE and Council of Europe monitors—citing numerous infractions and an uneven playing field for pro-government parties and the opposition—was critical. Kazakhstan's chances of winning the OSCE Chairmanship have clearly diminished. At the same time, President Nursultan Nazarbaev—who is under investigation for corruption by the U.S. Department of Justice—has announced his intention to run, yet again, for reelection in 2006. Some commentators speculate that he may hold snap

elections next year, to keep his opposition off guard. Should he win and serve out another seven-year term, he will have been in office almost 25 years.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, Central Asian leaders do not find the responsibilities of the presidency too burdensome: Tajikistan's President Imomali Rakhmonov last year orchestrated a referendum on constitutional changes that could allow him to remain in office until 2020. True, Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asia where Islamic political activism is tolerated. We await with interest the parliamentary elections, in which opposition and Islamic parties will participate, scheduled for next February.

As for Turkmenistan, one of the most repressive countries on earth, I'm pleased to note that freedom of religion advanced a bit. The government of President Saparmurat Niyazov took some steps to liberalize the process of registration for confessions—instead of 500 adult members per locality, now only five nationwide are needed to register a community. For years, only Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodoxy were legal; now Ashgabat has registered Baptists, Adventists, Hare Krishna's, and Baha'is. Moreover, the authorities released six Jehovah's Witnesses, although two others remain jailed along with the former grand mufti. These steps—taken under Western and especially U.S. pressure, but which we welcome nonetheless—allowed Turkmenistan to escape designation by the U.S. Government as a Country of Particular Concern this past year. However, troubling reports continue to emerge about limitations on religious freedom and harassment of registered and unregistered religious communities. We must continue to monitor the situation closely and encourage Turkmenistan to continue moving forward with reforms, as even the improved situation is far from meeting OSCE standards on religious freedom.

In all other respects, however, democratization has made no progress. Turkmenistan remains the only one-party state in the former Soviet bloc and Niyazov's cult of personality continues unabated. Recently, he tried to discuss holding presidential elections in 2008. But in a farcical scene, the assembled officials and dignitaries refused to hear of it. They "insisted" that Niyazov remain Turkmenistan's leader in perpetuity; he, duly humbled by their adulation, took the issue off the table.

This brings us to Kyrgyzstan, in many ways the most intriguing of the Central Asian states. Of all the region's leaders, only President Askar Akaev, who has held office for almost 15 years, has announced his intention not to run next year for reelection—though he has phrased the pledge carefully if he changes his mind. Kyrgyzstan is also the only Central Asian country where a large-scale protest movement has ever seemed poised to force a Head of State out of office: in summer 2002, thousands of people furious about the shootings of demonstrators in a southern district blocked the country's main road, and threatened a mass march on the capital, Bishkek. Ultimately, the movement petered out but the precedent of public activism was set.

President Akaev's stated intention not to run again, the upcoming parliamentary (February 2005) and presidential (October 2005) elections and Kyrgyzstan's history of protest movements make for an interesting situation. In the next few months, Akaev must make